



## Episode 424 - False Flags: The Secret History of Al Qaeda - Part 3: The War of Terror

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**"Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale hath had its effect."**

*Jonathan Swift*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Kabul, Afghanistan. August 29th, 2021.*

A white 1996 Toyota Corolla races down the dusty streets of the Afghan capital.

Just days earlier, a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport had killed thirteen US Marines and dozens of Afghans. American forces, on high alert, track the Corolla from above. An American MQ-9 Reaper drone hovers high up, monitoring the driver—Zemari Ahmadi—as he stops at a suspected ISIS safe house and loads the car with explosives before continuing his journey to the airport.

But Ahmadi never reaches his destination. At 4:50 PM, the order is given and the Reaper drone launches a hellfire missile at the vehicle, killing the would-be terrorist and destroying his explosive payload.

The media, focused on the conflict in Afghanistan for the first time in years, air live coverage of the Pentagon's announcement: In the waning hours of America's two-decade-long military presence in Afghanistan, another terror threat has been liquidated and more innocent lives have been saved.

**GEN. WILLIAM TAYLOR:** Yesterday, US military forces conducted an over-the-horizon counterterrorism operation against an ISIS-K planner and facilitator. The air strike occurred in the Nangarhar province of Afghanistan. I can confirm, as more information has come in, that two high-profile ISIS targets were killed and one was wounded and we know of zero civilian casualties.

**SOURCE:** [Military officials hold news conference at Pentagon after drone strike](#)

But as the smoke cleared on the scene of the strike, some [grisly truths](#) began to emerge: Ahmadi had *not* been a terrorist. He was *not* on his way to set off a suicide bomb at the Kabul Airport. The car didn't even have explosives.

In reality, Ahmadi had been an aid worker for an American NGO distributing food to malnourished Afghans. He wasn't on his way to the airport; he was arriving home after a day at the office. The "suspicious packages" that the drone operators had watched him load into his car were in fact water bottles that Ahmadi was bringing home because his neighbourhood was dealing with a water shortage.

In perhaps the greatest irony, Ahmadi had applied for a special visa to emigrate to the US with his family just days before his death. Now, that family was devastated, torn apart by an explosion that left Ahmadi and nine of his relatives—including a two-year-old—dead.

Finally forced to admit that every part of the drone strike story had been a lie, the Pentagon called it a "[tragic mistake](#)." And, after a three-month self-investigation, it was decided that [no one involved in that "mistake" would receive any punishment](#) for killing 10 innocent Afghans.

The story of the killing of Zemari Ahmadi is the story of the War on Terror in a nutshell. Ahmadi's death was cast as a "tragic mistake" for which no one was to blame, just as America's decades-long debacle in the Middle East—from the invasion, occupation and eventual chaotic retreat from Afghanistan to the illegal invasion of Iraq and the rise of ISIS to the regime change operations in Libya and Syria—had been a "failure" of military planning.

But, when viewed in its proper context, the war on terror was no failure. In fact, waged on fictitious grounds against a shadow enemy, the great military campaign of the 21st century was not a war on terror at all. It was a war *of* terror, a pretext for the construction of an international security grid in the name of fighting a bogeyman that never existed in the first place.

And by *that* metric, the war *of* terror was successful beyond its planners' wildest dreams.

### **Part Three: The War of Terror**

For many in the general public, the war on terror was a direct consequence of 9/11, and that war began with George W. Bush's address to Congress on September 20, 2001:

**GEORGE W. BUSH:** Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.

**SOURCE:** [President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001](#)

Some even believe that the war ended with Barack Obama's declaration of May 23, 2013:

**BARACK OBAMA:** Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless “global war on terror,” but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America.

**SOURCE:** [Remarks by the President at the National Defense University](#)

But, as convenient as these statements are for creating bookends for the story of the war on terror, they do *not* tell the real story of that war. In fact, the origins of the global war on terror go back much further than the general public has been led to believe.

In 1962, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by General Lyman Lemnitzer, issued a startling proposal to President John F. Kennedy on how to get the public on board with military invention in Cuba to remove Fidel Castro from power. Called [Operation Northwoods](#), the plan suggested a number of staged provocations, secretly committed by the US itself but blamed on Castro, including: blowing up a US ship in Guantanamo Bay and blaming the incident on the Cuban government; staging terror attacks in the United States to be blamed on Cuban terrorists; and even painting up a remote-controlled plane to resemble a passenger jet and destroying it over Cuba.

The incredible plan, rejected by Kennedy, who subsequently refused to renew Lemnitzer's term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was classified and was [not revealed to the public until 2001](#), just months before 9/11.

**JAMES BAMFORD:** The idea was to create a pretext to show that there was an attack by Cuba on the United States. And the idea was to have US personnel from the CIA and other places secretly create terrorism in the United States. The document actually said people would be shot on American streets, bombs would be blown up. And again, all this the evidence would be laid to point the finger at Castro.

One other idea was they were going to—they had a very complex plan where they were going to take an aircraft and load it with CIA people that looked like college students, fly it over to—have it take off from an airport in Miami with a lot of publicity and then it would—quickly after it got into the air—land at a secret CIA base. At that same time, an identical plane would take off from that CIA base, except this plane would be empty and it would be remotely piloted from the ground. It would be a drone plane that would be very similar to the passenger plane that had just taken off.

And once the plane was over Cuba, there was going to be a tape recorder that would have played a distress call to a microphone saying, "Help, we're being shot at!" And a few minutes later—once the plane was over the Caribbean Sea after it passed over Cuba—somebody would have pressed the button on the ground, blowing up the plane. And they would have blamed Cuba for killing a plane load of American college students.

**SOURCE:** [Operation Northwoods explained by James Bamford](#)

But even after its rejection, the Northwoods idea of using spectacular terror attacks as the justification for a widescale war continued to be employed by military planners.

In November 1998, Philip Zelikow—who would go on to chair the 9/11 Commission—co-wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs*, the Council on Foreign Relations' publication, with Ashton Carter, the future Secretary of Defense under President Obama, and John Deutsch, the former director of the CIA. Titled "[Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger](#)," the article warns of a potential "transforming event," such as an attack on the World Trade Center:

"Like Pearl Harbor, the event would divide our past and future into a before and after. The United States might respond with draconian measures scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects and use of deadly force. More violence could follow, either future terrorist attacks or U.S. counterattacks. Belatedly, Americans would judge their leaders negligent for not addressing terrorism more urgently."

The solution to this impending threat of catastrophic terrorism, Zelikow and his co-authors argue, is to take that threat seriously—as the US government did in 1940 when it "pondered what kind of forces it would need to wage a global war"—and to create new offices for coordinating homeland security and waging pre-emptive strikes against potential terrorists around the world.

Then, unnoticed by much of the public, the global war on terror was first proposed on live TV on the morning of 9/11. At 11:28 AM New York time, as the blanket of dust from the freshly exploded towers was still settling on Manhattan and much of the world was still trying to process what was happening, a guest on BBC World News laid out the dawning of the new age of global terror with remarkable foresight. But this prediction was not delivered by a US government official or an American intelligence agent or a Washington Beltway insider. It was delivered by Ehud Barak, the former Prime Minister of Israel.

**PRESENTER:** Joining me now here in the BBC World studio is the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who's in London at the moment. Mr. Barak, welcome to BBC World. First, your reaction, having heard what's happened. At least four planes have been hijacked and there may be more.

**EHUD BARAK:** The world will not be the same from today on. It's an attack against our whole civilization. I don't know who is responsible. I believe we will know in 12 hours.

If it is a kind of bin Laden organization, and even if it's something else, I believe that this is the time to deploy a globally concerted effort led by the United States, the UK, Europe and Russia against all sources of terror—the same kind of struggle that our forefathers launched against the piracy on the high seas.

**SOURCE:** [September 11, 2001 - 11:28am EDT \(4:28pm BST\) - BBC World News](#)

In the chaos of September 11, 2001, mere minutes after the destruction of the Twin Towers, the global viewing public was presented all the key takeaways of 9/11: that "this is the time to deploy a globally concerted effort led by the United States"; that "the world will not be the same from today on"; and, of course, that we "don't know who was responsible," although "we will know in 12 hours." But the name immediately implanted in the minds of the audience—not for the first nor the last time on that long day of news coverage—was that of Osama bin Laden.

In the following days, these takeaways became the talking points for the US government and its allies around the world. Before the day was over, President Bush was already laying the rhetorical

groundwork for the coming war, vowing that "[we stand together to win the war against terrorism](#)." By the end of the week, the American public was being prepared for a conflict much bigger than a conventional war: "[This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while](#)."

And, in the following week, Bush confirmed what the public had been told since the moment of the live televised strike on the World Trade Center:

**JON SCOTT:** We just saw on live television as a second plane flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center. Now, given what has been going on around the world, some of the key suspects come to mind: Osama bin Laden. Who knows what?

**SOURCE:** [\*Original News Broadcast on 9/11/01\*](#)

**BUSH:** Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as Al Qaeda.

**SOURCE:** [\*President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001\*](#)

By the end of the month, the public had heard so many authoritative pronouncements about "the evidence" pointing to bin Laden's responsibility for the 9/11 attacks that few noticed when the US government declined to release a [promised white paper](#) outlining that evidence—a decision prompted by a "[lack of solid information](#)" about the plot, according to government sources cited by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh. Instead, the presentation of such evidence was outsourced—as so much of the dirty work in the global war on terror would be—to a third-party nation-state: the United Kingdom.

On September 30, 2001, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair appeared on the BBC's [\*Breakfast with Frost\*](#) program to declare he had been shown "absolutely powerful, incontrovertible evidence of [bin Laden's] link to the events of the 11th of September," but because the evidence came from "sensitive sources" he could not simply reveal it to the public. Rather, the UK government would release a report laying out its case against Osama in great detail.

That dossier, titled "[Responsibility for the terrorist atrocities in the United States](#)," was released on October 4th and was [touted by the press](#) as "the clearest case yet of Osama bin Laden's involvement in the September 11 attacks." The document opens, however, by noting that it "does not purport to provide a prosecutable case against Osama bin Laden in a court of law." The first 60 points of the report provide general background information about bin Laden and previous terror attacks attributed to Al Qaeda, and the last ten points, dealing with "Osama bin Laden and the 11 September attacks," are almost incomprehensibly vague.

It claims that "at least three" of the hijackers have been identified as "associates of Al Qaeda," without listing how this conclusion was arrived at or even who these associates are.

It claims that the attack "follows the modus operandi" of Al Qaeda and is "entirely consistent" with the planning of previous attacks attributed to the group.

And, most remarkably, it states that "[t]here is evidence of a very specific nature relating to the guilt of bin Laden and his associates that is too sensitive to release."



At almost the exact same time, momentous events were taking place in Europe, where the North Atlantic Council, NATO's main decision-making body, was receiving a classified briefing from a US State Department operative.

**LORD ROBERTSON:** This morning, the United States briefed the North Atlantic Council on the results of their investigation into who was responsible for the horrific terrorist attacks which took place on 11 September.

The briefing was given by Ambassador Frank Taylor, the United States Department of State Coordinator for Counter-terrorism.

[. . .]

The briefing addressed the events of 11 September themselves, the results of the investigation so far, what is known about Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization and their involvement in the attacks and in previous terrorist activity, and the links between Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The facts are clear and compelling. The information presented points conclusively to an Al Qaeda role in the 11 September attacks.

**SOURCE:** [Statement by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, October 2, 2001](#)

This was no ordinary briefing. The result of that briefing was that for the first time in its history, NATO invoked Article 5 of [its charter](#)—the self-defence clause that compels the organization to assist any member nation that is attacked by an outside force. By "proving" that bin Laden had committed the attack in connection with the Taliban, the United States could launch the war on terror and compel NATO to assist in its invasion of Afghanistan.

**LORD ROBERTSON:** On the basis of this briefing, it has now been determined that the attack against the United States on 11 September was directed from abroad and shall therefore be regarded as an action covered by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that an armed attack on one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.

I want to reiterate that the United States of America can rely on the full support of its 18 NATO allies in the campaign against terrorism.

Given the stakes involved, questions long swirled around this mysterious, classified briefing. What had Ambassador Frank Taylor told the North Atlantic Council that was so compelling? What information persuaded the world's largest and most powerful military alliance to launch an invasion of another nation? The public, it seemed, would never know.

**LORD ROBERTSON:** Today's was a classified briefing and so I cannot give you all the details. Briefings are also being given directly by the United States to the Allies in their capitals.

But then, in 2009, intelwire.com quietly posted [a document](#) online under the title "[Secret Post-9/11 Briefing to World Leaders](#)." The document is a US State Department cable addressed to the American embassies in the NATO countries and American allies around the world under the subject line "September 11: Working together to fight the plague of global terrorism and the case against Al

Qaeda." The cable is dated October 1, 2001—the day before Ambassador Taylor's meeting with the North Atlantic Council—and instructs its recipients to brief their host country's government on "the information linking the Al Qaeda terrorist network, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban regime to the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and the crash of United Airlines Flight 93."

The document went largely unnoticed until 2018, when Professor Niels Harrit wrote an article, "[The Mysterious Frank Taylor Report: The 9/11 Document that Launched US-NATO's 'War on Terrorism' in the Middle East](#)," connecting the dots between this document and the briefing that Ambassador Taylor gave to the North Atlantic Council.

**HARRIT:** This is in my mind with no doubt simply the legal basis for eighteen years of perpetual war in the Middle East. This is the basis for NATO's activation of Article 5. And so what is in the document and what is the evidence? What is the evidence which Lord Robertson calls "clear and compelling"? None. There's absolutely no evidence in that paper.

**SOURCE:** [\*The Secret Lie That Started the Afghan War\*](#)

Much like the UK government dossier, the State Department cable contains no actual evidence of a link between bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks. In fact, the cable is virtually identical to the UK report. After spending a full fifteen pages talking in generalities about terror, about the US government's officially sanctioned history of Al Qaeda, and of previous attacks attributed to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, the document finally arrives at "Part III" purporting to demonstrate Al Qaeda's involvement in the attacks.

But Part III begins by admitting that the investigation into the attacks is "still in the early stage" and that "[t]here are still gaps in our knowledge." It then goes on to detail circumstantial "evidence," including the observation that "bin Laden and his associates seemed to be anticipating what we could only identify as an important event or activity." Finally, the document talks about how the incident is "tactically similar to earlier attacks" because it involved planning and a desire to inflict mass casualties.

And with *that* complete lack of evidence, the war on terror was launched and the invasion of Afghanistan began.

And so, in October 2001, the bombs began dropping on Afghanistan. The war of terror had officially begun, and the public was told that one of the key objectives of that war was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden.

**REPORTER:** Do you want bin Laden dead?

**BUSH:** I want him . . . hell, I want justice. And there's an old poster out West, as I recall, that said "Wanted: Dead or Alive."

**SOURCE:** [\*CNN: 2001, President George W. Bush 'bin Laden, Wanted dead or alive'\*](#)

But as we have seen, one of the defining hallmarks of Al Qaeda throughout its reign of terror was its agents' uncanny ability to cross borders illegally, evade capture repeatedly and generally slip through intelligence agency dragnets unimpeded. This remarkable string of "good luck" included:

- the "Blind Sheik" Omar Abdel Rahman, who entered the US with CIA support and lived there unmolested even after his green card was revoked;
- World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef, who entered the US without the proper paperwork, working and living with a suspected terror ring that was under FBI surveillance, and fleeing the country before he was even a person of interest in the WTC investigation;
- Khalid Al-Mihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi, whose entry to the US from an Al Qaeda summit in Malaysia was known about and actively covered up by the CIA and who lived openly in the United States under their real names for over a year, repeatedly calling the Al Qaeda communications hub in Yemen that was being monitored by the NSA;
- and, most infamously, Al Qaeda "triple agent" Ali Mohammed, whose career as an Egyptian army officer, a "failed" CIA asset, a trusted aide to Al Qaeda second-in-command Ayman Al-Zawahiri, a US special forces training officer, a volunteer fighter in Afghanistan, an FBI deep-cover asset, Osama bin Laden's personal bodyguard and the trainer of many of Al Qaeda's terrorists throughout the 1990s is so improbable that it is generally ignored in most histories of Al Qaeda.

As incredible as all of those stories are, however, they pale in comparison to the story that was about to unfold: the "disappearance" of Osama bin Laden, ostensibly the most wanted man on the planet, from under the noses of the American military and intelligence services.

Osama bin Laden's remarkable post-9/11 "disappearance" actually began on 9/11 itself, when his whereabouts were not a mystery to America or its allies in the region. In fact, his location and activities on the night before 9/11 were well known to the US, although that information would not be revealed to the public until after his "escape."

**BARRY PETERSEN:** Everyone remembers what happened on September 11th. Here's the story of what may have happened the night before. It is a tale as twisted as the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

CBS News has been told that the night before the September 11th terrorist attack, Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan. He was getting medical treatment with the support of the very military that days later pledged its backing for the US war on terror in Afghanistan. Pakistan intelligence sources tell CBS News that bin Laden was spirited into this military hospital in Rawalpindi for kidney dialysis treatment.

**SOURCE:** [\*Dan Rather Reports: 9/11 bin Laden At Rawalpindi Hospital September 10th 2001\*](#)

Despite knowing bin Laden's precise location and activities right up to the moment of 9/11, however, and despite the fact that the Al Qaeda leader was already a wanted fugitive subject to [international arrest warrants](#) and [under indictment by a US federal court](#), bin Laden continued to move around internationally with the full knowledge and complicity of state intelligence services. And, as remarkable as this may seem, bin Laden's trip to Rawalpindi on the eve of 9/11 was neither the first nor the last time that the US would allow him to evade capture.

In the weeks after the attack, the Taliban offered to [try bin Laden in Afghanistan](#) or even hand him over to a third-party country if the US provided them with the same proof of Bin Laden's guilt for 9/11 that Ambassador Taylor had supposedly provided NATO. Bush [turned the offer down](#). Then,



after the invasion of Afghanistan began in October, the Taliban again [tried to hand bin Laden over](#), this time dropping the request for proof of his guilt. [Bush again refused](#).

The war of terror, it turned out, was not about getting Osama. In fact, if bin Laden *had* been captured or killed, it would have derailed the carefully laid plans for the Bush Administration's aggressive new foreign policy.

But, having been sold on the simplified version of the war on terror—the one that held the objective of that war was to kill or capture Osama bin Laden and to liquidate the Al Qaeda network—the public believed that the fighting would be short and decisive, like the first Gulf War. After all, how hard would it be for the army of the world's unrivaled military superpower employing the tools of the most high-tech intelligence community in history to capture a lone fighter on dialysis in the caves of Tora Bora?

Bush administration officials were quick to temper the public's expectations on this point. This was no ordinary elderly man living in an undefended cave, after all. This was a comic book supervillain, an evil millionaire mastermind directing a terrorist army from his elaborate cave fortress.

**TIM RUSSERT:** . . . there is constant discussion about him hiding out in caves, and I think many times the American people have a perception that it's a little hole dug out of a side of a mountain.

**DONALD RUMSFELD:** Oh, no.

**RUSSERT:** This is it. This is a fortress! A complex, multi-tiered. Bedrooms and offices on the top, as you can see. Secret exits on the side and on the bottom. Cut deep to avoid thermal detection. A ventilation system to allow people to breathe and to carry on. The entrances large enough to drive trucks and even tanks. Even computer systems and telephone systems. It's a very sophisticated operation.

**RUMSFELD:** Oh, you bet. This is serious business. And there's not *one* of those, there are *many* of those!

**SOURCE:** [Bin Laden's cave according to Rumsfeld](#)

This was a lie, of course. There were no high-tech cave fortresses, no "multi-tiered bedrooms and offices on the top," no "secret exits on the side," no ventilation system or computer systems. It was a fabrication, a literal artist's rendering with as much reality as that of a comic book or a cartoon.

But, as an unfolding drama for the public following the war on their television sets half a world away, this story had enough twists and turns to keep any audience engaged.

The first phase of the war went as predicted. By November, America's relentless bombing had already routed the Taliban, driving them from Kabul toward Kunduz in the north. There, the trapped fighters—including not only Taliban but Al Qaeda members as well as Pakistani Army officers, intelligence advisers, and volunteers—were saved from certain defeat by a miracle: the arrival of a squadron of Pakistani aircraft that flew in and airlifted them back to Pakistan.

It was later [confirmed](#) that the operation—dubbed the "[airlift of evil](#)"—was signed off on by the Bush Administration, who had cut a secret deal with Pakistani President Musharraf to let the fighters escape and who "ordered the United States Central Command to set up a special air corridor to help insure the safety of the Pakistani rescue flights."

But what about Osama bin Laden? As it turns out, his whereabouts were no great mystery to American forces, and, once again, he was allowed to escape.

On the eve of the invasion of Afghanistan in October, the *Guardian* [reported](#) that "Osama bin Laden was in Kabul last week and US and British intelligence agencies have a 'pretty good idea' where he is now," suggesting that "Western intelligence has a much clearer picture of bin Laden's recent movements than has been admitted." The report went on to note that bin Laden's "capture or death would reduce the pressure for wider military action against Afghanistan." But this intelligence did not lead to bin Laden's apprehension.

As American forces honed in on Kabul in early November, bin Laden and all of his closest advisors managed to escape to Jalalabad in a very conspicuous late-night convoy. One eyewitness [reported](#): "We don't understand how they weren't all killed the night before, because they came in a convoy of at least 1,000 cars and trucks. It was a very dark night, but it must have been easy for American pilots to see the headlights."

On November 13th, just one day before the Northern Alliance captured Jalalabad, bin Laden escaped once again, this time in a convoy of [several hundred cars](#). Despite believing bin Laden to be in one of the vehicles, US forces opted to ignore the convoy and instead bombed the nearby Jalalabad airport.

Bin Laden and his men, now numbering a few hundred fighters, arrived in mid-November at the mountainous Khyber Pass on the border of Pakistan. On November 15th, with the remaining Al Qaeda and Taliban holdouts pinned down in the caves of Tora Bora, the US military was in a position to eliminate the Al Qaeda threat, kill Osama bin Laden and end the war on terror.

But, remarkably, the Marines, special forces and CIA operatives who were positioned and ready to do this were blocked from doing so by their own superiors.

**NARRATOR:** That winter, the CIA was still at war. The Taliban had fallen. Now it was Osama bin Laden's turn.

**GARY BERNTSEN:** I'm looking for bin Laden right away. I want to start killing him and his people immediately.

**GARY SCHROEN:** We had intelligence that continued to develop that bin Laden and Zawahiri were in Afghanistan, probably in the eastern areas, hiding out there.

**NARRATOR:** The CIA tried to put together a team to chase bin Laden. It wasn't easy.

**GARY BERNTSEN:** I asked Army special forces if they'll send people in. They say, "No, we're not going down there. It's unstable. You don't have a reliable ally."

**STEVE COLL:** The conditions for Al Qaeda's retreat were quite favorable, and the United States did not do the one thing that the Pentagon had within its power to do, which was to move regular US troops into a blocking position behind these mountains.

**SOURCE:** [\*The Dark Side \(Frontline\)\*](#)

The story, exhaustively documented by [CIA operatives](#), [special forces operators](#), [journalists](#) and even a [US Senate report](#), is clear and unambiguous.

As the US Senate report notes: "By early December 2001, bin Laden's world had shrunk to a complex of caves and tunnels carved into a mountainous section of eastern Afghanistan known as Tora Bora."

Both the CIA and Delta Force—the US Army's elite special operations unit—had tracked bin Laden from Jalalabad to Tora Bora. They had "real-time eavesdropping capabilities on Al Qaeda almost from their arrival, allowing them to track movements and gauge the effectiveness of the bombing" and were able to pick up radio communications featuring bin Laden directly issuing commands to his troops. They had him surrounded on three sides, and the relentless air strikes—including the use of a 15,000 pound "daisy cutter" not used since Vietnam—were decimating what was left of bin Laden's forces. All that was needed was to secure the mountain pass leading out of Tora Bora and into Pakistan.

Gary Berntsen, the head of the CIA's paramilitary operation against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, knew that the Afghan militias that the US had cobbled together were not up to the job of securing the pass. From mid-November to mid-December, he repeatedly begged his superiors for one battalion of US Army Rangers—just 800 troops—to help stop bin Laden from slipping away.

As the US Senate later noted, fulfilling Berntsen's request "would have been a manageable task":

In late November, about the time US intelligence placed bin Laden squarely at Tora Bora, more than 1,000 members of the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units, among the military's most mobile arms, established a base southwest of Kandahar, only a few hours flight away. [. . .] Another 1,000 troops from the Army's 10th Mountain Division were split between a base in southern Uzbekistan and Bagram Air Base, a short helicopter flight from Tora Bora.

General James Mattis, the commander of the Marines at Kandahar, told a journalist that his troops could seal off Tora Bora, but his superiors rejected the plan.

Berntsen fared no better in his quest to obtain 800 Army Rangers for the mission. Not only was his request rejected, but, remarkably, in the middle of the most important battle of the war, he was replaced as head of the CIA force in Afghanistan, effective immediately. His replacement was to be Rich Blee, the same CIA bin Laden unit chief who had helped conceal the information about Al-Mihdhar and Alhazmi's entry to the US from the FBI. Blee was accompanied to Afghanistan by Michael Anne Casey, the bin Laden unit staffer who had actually stopped Doug Miller from sharing that info with the FBI.

At first, Berntsen was told that his request was denied because it might "alienate our Afghan allies."

"I don't give a damn about alienating our allies!" he [replied](#). "I only care about eliminating Al Qaeda and delivering bin Laden's head in a box!"

Later, though, a different story emerged. As it turns out, at the exact same time that bin Laden was holed up in Tora Bora, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld ordered General Tommy Franks, who was leading the Afghan invasion, to redirect planning resources from Afghanistan to the Pentagon's next target in the war of terror: Iraq.

As even the official story of the war on terror acknowledges, bin Laden and his top aides, seizing their opportunity, simply walked out of Tora Bora and into Pakistan.

And, just like that, the bogeyman of the war on terror was gone, allowed to escape yet again. He would reappear from time to time to continue reminding the public about the origins of the terror war. But now, the public's attention was being turned to a new bogeyman.

**QUESTION:** Mr. President, in your speeches now, you rarely talk [about] or mention Osama bin Laden. Why is that?

Also, can you tell the American people if you have any more information—if you know if he is dead or alive. Deep in your heart, don't you truly believe that until you find out if he is dead or alive, you won't really want to make—

**BUSH:** Well, deep in my heart, I know the man's on the run if he's alive at all. And I—you know, who knows if he's hiding in some cave or not? We hadn't heard from him in a long time.

And the idea of focusing on one person is really—indicates to me people don't understand the scope of the mission. Terror's bigger than one person. And he's just—he's a person who has now been marginalized. His network is—his host government has been destroyed. He's the ultimate parasite who found weakness, exploited it, and met his match.

He is—you know, as I mention in my speeches—I do mention the fact that this is a fellow who is willing to commit youngsters to their death. And he, himself, tries to hide, if, in fact, he's hiding at all.

So I don't know where he is. Nor—you know, I just don't spend that much time on him really, to be honest with you.

**SOURCE:** [\*Presidential News Conference March 13, 2002\*](#)

**BUSH:** Some have argued that confronting the threat from Iraq could detract from the war against terror. To the contrary, confronting the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning the war on terror.

**SOURCE:** [\*President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat\*](#)

That the Bush Administration would pivot so quickly from hunting Osama bin Laden to toppling Saddam Hussein was only surprising to those who did not know the neocons populating the Bush administration or their well-documented and long-held desire to affect regime change in Iraq.

In 1996, a group of prominent neoconservatives—including Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser—wrote a report for then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Titled "[A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm](#)," the report urged Israel to "shape its strategic environment" by "weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria." The way to do this, the report concluded, was to "focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq—an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right—as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions."

In 1997, twenty-five prominent neocons—including ten who would go on to serve in the Bush Administration, and even Jeb Bush, the future president's brother—signed a "[Statement of Principles](#)" as the founding charter of a new think tank called the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). The statement called on then-President Clinton to reverse the defense spending

cuts that marked the post-Cold War era and to "increase defense spending significantly." In 1998, the group followed up with an [open letter to Clinton](#) urging him to "turn your Administration's attention to implementing a strategy for removing Saddam's regime from power."

Surrounding himself with neocons on the campaign trail and eventually installing those neocons in all of the key security positions in his cabinet, President George W. Bush wasted no time in making these regime change dreams a reality.

As Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill [later revealed](#), at his first major national security council meeting—held just ten days into the new administration—"President Bush tasked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Hugh Shelton to begin preparing options for the use of US ground forces in the northern and southern no-fly zones in Iraq to support an insurgency to bring down the Saddam regime." The second national security council meeting of the Bush administration, held two days later, [also discussed regime change in Iraq](#), with one briefing document at the meeting marked "secret" and [bearing the title](#) "Plan for post-Saddam Iraq."

**RON SUSKIND:** From the very first instance, it was about Iraq, it was about what we can do to change this regime.

**LESLEY STAHL:** Now, everybody else thought that grew out of 9/11.

**SUSKIND:** No.

**STAHL:** But this book says it was day one of this administration.

**SUSKIND:** Day one, these things were laid and sealed.

**SOURCE:** [\*Before 9/11, Bush Asked To "Go Find Me A Way" To Invade Iraq\*](#)

And, infamously, on the day of 9/11 itself, the administration was already beginning plans for a retaliatory strike not just on bin Laden in Afghanistan but on Iraq.

A note taken at 2:40 PM on September 11, 2001, [records Rumsfeld saying](#) he wanted "best info fast. Judge whether good enough to hit Saddam Hussein at the same time. Not only bin Laden." He also made sure to order staff to "go massive" and "sweep it all up" including "things related and not."

From before Bush even got into office, there was no doubt that he would attack Iraq. 9/11 and the war on terror merely presented the neocons with the perfect opportunity to fulfill that agenda. The only problem was how to tie Iraq into the war on terror in the minds of the public, a problem that Bush himself admitted to.

**BUSH:** You know, one of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror.

**SOURCE:** [\*Couric Interview Bush September 6, 2006\*](#)

**BUSH:** Of course we're after Saddam Hussein . . . I mean bin Laden. He's . . . he's . . . he's isolated.

**SOURCE:** [\*George W. Bush and John Kerry 1st Presidential Debate 2004\*](#)

The job of connecting the public face of the war on terror—bin Laden and Al Qaeda—to Saddam and Iraq was made more difficult by the fact that there was no such connection. Difficult, but not impossible, for a committed cadre with no qualms about using mendacity to achieve their political objectives.

The most direct link between Al Qaeda and Iraq was a trip that alleged 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta was reported to have made to the Iraqi consulate in Prague in April 2001. After Atta's pictures were published in the media in the wake of 9/11, a Middle East informant told Czech intelligence that he had seen Atta meeting with a suspected Iraqi intelligence agent in the Czech Republic that spring.

The story became even more salacious when—at the height of the anthrax scare in October 2001—"anonymous Israeli intelligence sources" planted a story in the German media that Atta had in fact [received anthrax spores](#) from his Iraqi contact in Prague.

But the entire story was such a preposterous lie that it was quickly disowned by both [the FBI](#) and [the CIA](#). Investigators found "there was no evidence Atta left or returned to the US" during that time frame and "pointed to other evidence, including Atta's cell phone records, to cast doubt on the idea that any meeting had occurred." And, despite the fantastical, anonymous, evidence-free reports in German media, the anthrax used in the anthrax attacks on America in the fall of 2001 did not source from Iraq, but from the US military's [own bioweapons laboratory](#).

None of this stopped Vice President Dick Cheney from [repeating the lie](#) in his media appearances in the run-up to the Iraq War, however.

**CHENEY:** We've seen, in connection with the hijackers, of course, Mohamed Atta, who was the lead hijacker, did apparently travel to Prague on a number of occasions. And on at least one occasion, we have reporting that places him in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before the attack on the World Trade Center.

**SOURCE:** [Cheney on "Meet the Press" September 8, 2002](#)

The story of Iraqi agents handing flasks of anthrax to 9/11 hijackers was a little too fanciful even for the credulous American public, however, and it was soon [dropped from the neocons' sales pitch](#) for the Iraq war.

Instead, a different set of lies would need to be found to sell the public on the illegal invasion of a sovereign nation.

On January 31, 2003—six months after senior British intelligence [complained behind closed doors](#) that the "facts were being fixed around the policy" of invading Iraq—Bush met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the White House for a discussion on the matter. As a [now-infamous](#) memo documenting the meeting records, Bush had already decided on military action, and a start date for the bombing of March 10th "was now pencilled in." Given that it was unlikely that the UN would pass a resolution authorizing the invasion absent some compelling incident, Bush suggested a way that Iraq could be provoked into aggressive action.

[According to the memo:](#) "The US was thinking of flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in UN colours. If Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach" of existing UN resolutions, thus justifying military action. The stunning and documented admission that



President Bush had suggested staging a false flag event as one option for provoking a war received some press attention at the time but has since largely been forgotten.

After all, they did not need to get Iraq to shoot down a spy plane. The neocons had hit on a different strategy for selling the war to the public.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** If the Iraqi regime wishes peace, it will immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction.

**SOURCE:** [\*President Bush at United Nations General Assembly 2002\*](#)

**COLIN POWELL:** One of the most worrisome things that emerges from the thick intelligence file we have on Iraq's biological weapons is the existence of mobile production facilities used to make biological agents.

**SOURCE:** [\*Colin Powell's Speech at the UN 2003\*](#)

**CHENEY:** He now is trying, through his illicit procurement network, to acquire the equipment he needs to be able to enrich uranium to make the bombs—

**RUSSET:** —Aluminum tubes.

**CHENEY:** Specifically, aluminum tubes. There was a story in *The New York Times* this morning . . .

**SOURCE:** [\*Cheney on "Meet the Press" September 8, 2002\*](#)

**RICE:** The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

**SOURCE:** [\*Condoleezza Rice on CNN Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer September 8, 2002\*](#)

As these drawings, based on their descriptions, show, we know what the fermenters look like. We know what the tanks, pumps, compressors and other parts look like. We know how they fit together. We know how they work. And we know a great deal about the platforms on which they are mounted.

**SOURCE:** [\*Colin Powell's Speech at the UN 2003\*](#)

**BUSH:** And my message to Saddam Hussein is that, for the sake of peace, for the sake of freedom, you must disarm like you said you would do. But my message to you all, and to the country, is this: for the sake of our future freedoms, and for the sake of world peace, if the United Nations can't act, and if Saddam Hussein won't act, the United States will lead a coalition of nations to disarm Saddam Hussein.

**SOURCE:** [\*Remarks by the President at South Dakota Welcome October 31, 2002\*](#)

As decades of after-the-fact journalism has exhaustively documented, every aspect of the "Weapons of Mass Destruction" story was a transparent and admitted lie. But it was a remarkably successful

lie. Six months into the Iraq war, [a stunning 82%](#) of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein had "provided assistance" to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and 69% believed that Saddam was personally involved in the September 11th attacks.

As the months wore on, however, it became harder to hide the fact that the mythical WMD stashes and mobile weapons labs and aluminum tubes that the public had been assured were keys to the "imminent threat" posed by Saddam's regime simply weren't there. Even the corporate press that had worked so hard to sell these lies to the public had to start pointing out the obvious: the Bush administration had lied in order to sell an illegal invasion of a sovereign country to the American public and to the people of the world.

The neocons realized that a renewed effort was going to be needed to connect Iraq to the war on terror in order to keep the public on board with the war as the invasion of Iraq morphed into the occupation of Iraq. And, as always, the Al Qaeda threat would serve the purpose of terrifying the public into rallying once again behind their government. The fact that Iraq and Al Qaeda were mortal enemies might have been an insurmountable obstacle to anyone concerned with the truth. But these were neocons. Their logic was simple: if the Al Qaeda bogeyman didn't exist in Iraq, they would have to create it. So that's exactly what they did.

Founded in Jordan in 1999, even the official history of the terrorist organization that became known as "Al Qaeda in Iraq" acknowledges that the group originally had nothing to do with either Al Qaeda or Iraq. Instead, its founder, Ahmed al-Khalaylah, was a Jordanian militant whose terror cell *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, or "Congregation of Monotheism and Jihad," was dedicated to the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy.

Like many of the figures in the Al Qaeda story, the [biography of al-Khalaylah](#) is not that of a devout Muslim, let alone a dedicated *jihadi*. A high school dropout, al-Khalaylah was known for [drunken brawls and drug dealing](#) and was [jailed for sexual assault](#) before going to Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen in 1989, just as the Soviets were leaving. From there, the story of this soon-to-be-feared terrorist leader tells us he returned to Jordan "a few years later," founded a terror cell known as Jund al-Sham that attracted the attention of the authorities, and was sent to prison in 1992 where he "adopted more radical Islamic beliefs."

After his release from the Jordanian prison in 1999, he immediately became involved in a new plot to bomb the Radisson SAS Hotel in Amman and several tourist sites in Jordan just before New Year's Day 2000. The plot was foiled, and al-Khalaylah fled through Pakistan to Afghanistan, where, we are told, he met with bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders, with whose assistance he set up a terrorist training camp for Jordanian militants in Herat.

Joining the resistance to the US invasion after 9/11 and adopting the *nom de guerre* Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, he fled to Iran in January 2002. His whereabouts and activities during 2002 are "difficult to pin down" but "Western and Arab intelligence agencies" [assured \*The Washington Post\*](#) that, despite being a known terror operative and wanted by numerous governments, Zarqawi, like many other Al Qaeda figures, "moved frequently and with relative ease among Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, expanding his network."

Then, in 2003, still a relative unknown even within the world of militant *jihad*, Zarqawi turned up in Baghdad, where he was catapulted to international infamy not by his actions, nor by the promotion of Osama bin Laden or other *jihadis*, but by the US government.

**POWELL:** But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the al-Qaida terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder. Iraq today harbors a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Usama bin Laden and his al-Qaida lieutenants.

**SOURCE:** [Remarks to the United Nations Security Council](#)

The remarks, delivered during Colin Powell's infamous speech justifying the forthcoming invasion of Iraq to the UN Security Council in February of 2003, were—like most of the specific accusations in the address—demonstrably false. Zarqawi was a relative nobody in Iraq at the time; the CIA [later admitted](#) there was no evidence that Hussein had been "harboring" him; and his group was not, in fact, affiliated with Al Qaeda when Powell made his speech.

Nevertheless, these falsehoods started to become true after the spotlight of attention was showered on Zarqawi by the US State Department.

Attacks attributed to or claimed by Zarqawi were relatively few, but received inordinate amounts of attention from the international press. These attacks were often designed to inflame Shia/Sunni hatred, thus turning resistance to the occupation into a full-on sectarian conflict that tore the country to its roots.

And in 2004, Zarqawi—who, we are told, calculated that attaching the Al Qaeda brand name to his group would give it more caché in the *jihadi* world—pledged his allegiance to Osama bin Laden and received the Al Qaeda title "Emir of Al Qaeda in the Country of Two Rivers." The specter of Al Qaeda in Iraq—just another cynical and calculated lie when used by Powell to justify the Iraq invasion—had become a reality.

What resulted from this US government-promoted character was a career so remarkable that it could only be believed in a Hollywood action movie . . . or a history of Al Qaeda.

In 2004, after being allegedly caught and freed by Iraqi security forces in the Fallujah area because "[they didn't realize who he was](#)," Zarqawi was then [reportedly killed](#) in an American bombing raid in northern Iraq in March before pledging his allegiance to Osama and [officially joining Al Qaeda in October](#).

In 2005, Zarqawi was, according to various sources: [arrested in Baakuba](#) in January; left "[seriously injured, possibly dead](#)" after a US-led offensive in May; [evacuated to a neighbouring country](#) "with the help of doctors from the Arab Peninsula and the Sudan"; [killed in fighting in Ramadi in June](#) and buried in Fallujah; and [killed again](#) in a terrorist bombing in Mosul in November.

This remarkable career finally came to an end when, we were told, Zarqawi had been killed yet again (and presumably for good) in June of 2006.

**MILITARY BRIEFER:** The lead aircraft is going to engage it here momentarily with a 500-pound bomb on the target.

**ROSS CAMERON:** Two bombs dropped by an American F-16 strike home. A house outside Baqubah, north of Baghdad, is flattened. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq and one of the world's most wanted men, has been eliminated.

Iraqi police, who've lost hundreds of comrades in attacks blamed on Zarqawi, are celebrating. The White House is relieved.

**BUSH:** Now Zarqawi has met his end and this violent man will never murder again.

**SOURCE:** [\*Al-Qaeda's Iraqi leader al-Zarqawi has been killed\*](#)

But not everyone believed that this final account of Zarqawi's death was the true one. Rather than simply mistakes in reporting, other members of the Iraqi resistance insisted that Zarqawi had in fact been killed early on in the US invasion and that his name was simply being used to create an excuse for the continued American occupation of the country.

Sheikh Jawad Al-Khaleesi, a noted Shiite imam in Baghdad, was [\*quoted in Le Monde\*](#) as saying:

I don't think Abu Musab al-Zarqawi exists. He died in Northern Iraq at the beginning of the war (his family even conducted a funeral ceremony in Jordan). Since then, his name has been nothing but a toy, an excuse used by Americans to stay in Iraq.

Al-Khaleesi was not the only one with his doubts about Zarqawi's true nature. The Project on Defense Alternatives of the Commonwealth Institute in Massachusetts released [a report](#) in 2004 excoriating the US government for its propaganda attempting to portray Zarqawi as a terrorist leader in Iraq:

The evidence offered to support the administration's assessment of Zarqawi as a driver of the Iraqi insurgency and top lieutenant of bin Laden is reminiscent, in form and substance, of the spurious evidence regarding Iraq weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, some of the sources may be the same.

Similarly, [\*The Financial Times\*](#), [\*The Telegraph\*](#), [\*Knight Ridder Newspapers\*](#), [\*The Los Angeles Times\*](#) and [\*Newsweek\*](#) all published stories in 2004 calling various aspects of the Zarqawi myth into question.

A [report in The Telegraph in 2006](#) called him "a figurehead around whom dissident groups in Iraq were rallying, rather than an elusive fighter directing military operations," noting that "the more the Americans blamed al-Zarqawi for terrorist atrocities, the greater his credibility on the Arab street," and quoting an "unnamed Sunni insurgent leader" as calling Zarqawi "an American, Israeli and Iranian agent who is trying to keep our country unstable so that the Sunnis will keep facing occupation."

[According to The Atlantic](#), even Osama bin Laden himself "suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty [in 1998] had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence."

And then, right before he was reported dead for the last time, skeptics of the Zarqawi narrative were proven right in a remarkable fashion. On April 9, 2006, *The Washington Post* [published proof](#) in the form of internal military documents that the US government had played up the myth of Zarqawi and Al Qaeda in Iraq as part of a psychological operations campaign:

The US military is conducting a propaganda campaign to magnify the role of the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, according to internal military documents and officers familiar with the program. [...] For the past two years, US military leaders have been using Iraqi media and other outlets in Baghdad to publicize Zarqawi's role in the insurgency. The

documents explicitly list the 'U.S. Home Audience' as one of the targets of a broader propaganda campaign.

In case there was any doubt that the propaganda campaign was targeted at Americans, the program included the Pentagon "selectively leaking" a letter to a US reporter purported to be written by Zarqawi and boasting of his role in the wave of suicide attacks terrorizing Iraq. The letter was dutifully [covered by The New York Times](#) even though there were [serious questions](#) about whether it was real at all.

The *Washington Post* exposé quotes an internal briefing document produced by US military headquarters in Iraq revealing that US military chief spokesman Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt boasted that "[t]he Zarqawi PSYOP program is the most successful information campaign to date."

And then, two months after these explosive revelations, Zarqawi was reported dead for the last time, a character written out of the script once his value as a propaganda construct was exhausted.

With Zarqawi out of the picture, something else would be required to keep the American public, and the people of the world, invested in the War on Terror. The main villain in the battle would have to return. Thankfully for the US government, Osama bin Laden was only too happy to oblige.

From the time of his miraculous "escape" from Tora Bora on, the outside world only knew Osama bin Laden from his occasional video releases.

The most infamous of these productions was [a video](#) released to the public by the US Defense Department on December 13, 2001. Supposedly "obtained in Afghanistan during the search of a private home in Jalalabad" after anti-Taliban forces moved in to the city, the tape, [we are told](#), "bore a label indicating it was made on November 9" and "shows bin Laden sitting on the floor in a bare room in a house in Kandahar" with "several other men, including two aides and an unidentified cleric, or Sheikh." Most importantly, it contains—according to the Pentagon-provided subtitles that were added to the video before its distribution to the press—bin Laden's confession to planning the 9/11 attacks.

"We had notification since the previous Thursday that the event would take place that day," the US government translation has bin Laden saying. "We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy who would be killed based on the position of the tower."

The [press release](#) provided by the Pentagon noted that, due to the poor quality of the tape, they were not able to produce a verbatim transcript, but that their translation "does convey the messages and information flow" of the conversation, an answer that was apparently good enough for the White House press corps.

**REPORTER:** Ari, on the bin Laden video that the government released last week, can you offer assurances that the omissions in the government-supplied translation were not deliberate?

**ARI FLEISCHER:** Mark, I think Secretary Rumsfeld addressed that very eloquently earlier today, when he said, number one, this tape doesn't change anything—or, this translation doesn't change anything about the facts in the case. The Department of Defense translators worked very diligently on a very short timetable to put together a faithful translation and that's what they did. And if you note on the cover note of what the Department of Defense put out, they wrote "due to the quality of the original tape, it

is not a verbatim transcript of every word spoken during the meeting; but does convey the messages and information flow."

So I think what you saw was the very best effort possible and, as the Secretary said about the translation of Arabic, it's not a precise art that is agreed to by every translator.

**SOURCE:** [\*White House Daily Press Briefing — December 13, 2001\*](#)

But this answer was not sufficient for the foreign press. The following week, German TV channel Das Erste broadcast an edition of their investigate program, "[Monitor](#)," in which they hired their own independent translators to check the Pentagon's transcript of the tape. The report calls the Pentagon translation "very problematic," [noting](#) that "at the most important places where it is held to prove the guilt of bin Laden, it is not identical with the Arabic."

Translator Dr. Murad Alami, for instance, found that in the sentence "We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy," the words "in advance" had simply been inserted by the US government translators. Those words did not appear on the tape. Similarly, the word "previous" in "We had notification since the previous Thursday," was never said, and the subsequent statement that an event would take place on that day cannot be heard in the original Arabic version.

The Monitor report concludes that the Pentagon translation of Osama bin Laden's supposed confession tape—deliberately adding words in key passages to make it sound like a confession—was not only inaccurate but actually manipulative. As Gernot Rotter, a professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the Asia-Africa Institute at the University of Hamburg, states in the report: "The American translators who listened to the tapes and transcribed them apparently wrote a lot of things in that they wanted to hear but that cannot be heard on the tape no matter how many times you listen to it."

The startling revelation that the Osama bin Laden confession tape was not a confession tape at all—aired on Germany's premiere public broadcaster and widely discussed in the [German press](#)—was never reported in the US.

That video was followed in short order by a 30-minute video of a visibly gaunt and graying Osama bin Laden delivering what appears to be a last message to the Arab world. Released on December 27, 2001, and presumably recorded during the fight at Tora Bora, bin Laden comments on his own mortality: "God willing, America's end is near. And it doesn't depend on my continued existence. Whether Osama is killed or not, the awakening has begun." In the 30-minute video, bin Laden does not move his left arm at all and appears visibly weak.

Interested at that moment in turning the public's attention away from Osama bin Laden and toward the next front in the War on Terror, Iraq, the Bush administration [dismissed the video](#) as "sick propaganda possibly designed to mask the fact the Al Qaeda leader was already dead."

"He could have made the video and then ordered that it be released in the event of his death," *The Telegraph* quoted one White House aide as saying. "The guy is trying to show he's untouched by the US bombing but he looks under pressure to me."

Recorded months after his reported journey to Rawalpindi for kidney dialysis, this video would not be the first or the last time that Osama bin Laden would be reported as dead or dying. Like Abu



Musab al-Zarqawi, bin Laden was also reported dead on [several occasions](#) in the ensuing years, including:

- on December 26, 2001, when it was [reported](#) that Osama bin Laden had died from a serious lung complication in Tora Bora;
- on January 18, 2002, when Pakistani President [Pervez Musharraf told CNN](#): "I think now, frankly, he is dead for the reason he is a . . . kidney patient";
- in September 2006, when French intelligence [leaked a report](#) suggesting bin Laden had died of typhoid fever in Pakistan;
- and in March 2009, when former US foreign intelligence officer Angelo Codevilla [stated](#): "All the evidence suggests Elvis Presley is more alive today than Osama bin Laden."

But, also like Zarqawi, none of these reported deaths stopped the Osama bin Laden character from reappearing on the TV screens of a traumatized public to remind them of the importance of the ongoing war on terror.

What followed in the ensuing years was a series of video and audio releases of questionable provenance, often reported in carefully worded turns of phrase that gave the press plausible deniability as to whether or not the recordings really were of Osama bin Laden. A message aired on Al Jazeera in February 2003, for instance, was [reported by the BBC](#) as "a poor quality audio recording in which a man's voice, identified as bin Laden's, is heard calling for suicide attacks against Americans and resistance to any attack on Iraq."

The recordings were often mundane. An April 2006 audio message of a speaker "[believed to be Osama bin Laden](#)" called on Muslims to "prepare for a long war" in Sudan. A January 2010 audio message warned of the [dangers of climate change](#). "Talk about climate change is not an ideological luxury but a reality," the speaker, [purportedly bin Laden](#), told his fellow *jihadis*.

Other recordings appeared at opportune times for the planners of the war on terror, catapulting the terror threat back into the public consciousness just when questions about that narrative were beginning to emerge.

The 2004 US presidential election contest between George Bush and John Kerry, for instance, featured an unusual "October surprise": a [new Osama bin Laden videotape](#) in which the terror mastermind appears to claim responsibility for 9/11 and to warn the American public of future strikes.

**ANNOUNCER:** This is the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather reporting from CBS News Headquarters in New York.

**DAN RATHER:** Good evening. With just four days left in the presidential campaign, Osama bin Laden suddenly dropped himself right in the middle of it with a videotaped message to the people of the United States. The fugitive Al Qaeda leader admits for the first time that he indeed ordered the September 11th attack on America, he lays out his reasons for it and he threatens another attack.

This tape tends to confirm that bin Laden is alive and well safely somewhere. President Bush responded by saying the United States will not be intimidated. Senator Kerry said the country is united in its determination to hunt bin Laden down.

**SOURCE:** [CBS Evening News - October 29, 2004](#)

And then again, in September 2007, just days before General David Petraeus was set to deliver his [report to Congress](#) on the controversial "surge" in Iraq and just days before the sixth anniversary of 9/11, [there was Osama bin Laden](#) to remind the public of the ever-present terror threat.

**CHARLES GIBSON:** Just days before the sixth anniversary of 9/11, the man responsible for the death and horror that day is coming out of the shadows with a new videotape and more invective aimed at the United States. He lectures Americans on everything from religion to politics to taxes. No overt threats, but authorities are looking at whether the tape contains any signal to indicate a future attack.

**SOURCE:** [\*ABC World News Tonight With Charles Gibson In Kansas City, MO, September 7, 2007\*](#)

Capitalizing on the conveniently timed video release, President Bush was quick to cite it as evidence that Al Qaeda was connected to the war in Iraq and that the increasingly unpopular war—now generally understood to have been an illegal invasion waged on false pretenses—was in fact an essential part of the war on terror.

**BUSH:** I found it interesting that on the tape, Iraq was mentioned, which is a reminder that Iraq is a part of this war against extremists.

**SOURCE:** [\*Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Sydney, Australia\*](#)

But buried beneath the attention-grabbing headlines and substance-less soundbites with which the media covered this release, troubling questions began to arise about the nature of the video. The aging, weary, gaunt, graying and partially paralyzed Osama bin Laden of 2001 was gone, replaced by a visibly younger and healthier man, despite having numerous health problems and despite having presumably spent the better part of a decade on the run as the world's most wanted man.

Sporting jet black hair and what many media commentators pointed out looked like a fake beard, the figure on the screen seems to be moving in an unrealistic way. Bizarrely, [the video freezes](#) at the 1-minute-and-58-second mark while the audio continues. The image remains frozen for most of the video message, only resuming briefly around the 12-minute mark. What's more, all of the references to current events—those parts referenced in passing on the evening news as "proving that Osama is still alive"—take place during the times when the video is frozen.

In fact, the video proved so unusual that media commentators had to go out of their way to assure their viewers that it was indeed real.

**GIBSON:** Our chief investigative correspondent, Brian Ross, joins me again tonight from New York. Brian?

**BRIAN ROSS:** Charlie, US authorities say tonight there is no doubt the tape is authentic. It is bin Laden, black beard and all.

**SOURCE:** [\*ABC World News Tonight With Charles Gibson In Kansas City, MO, September 7, 2007\*](#)

Perhaps the strangest part of the video, however, was the manner in which it was released to the public. The video, it turns out, was not released by Al Qaeda, but by the US government.

The month after the video's release it was [reported](#) that the video had originally been "intercepted" by SITE Intelligence Group, described as "one of several small, commercial intelligence firms that specialize in intercepting al-Qaeda's internet communications, often by clandestine means." According to [The Washington Post](#):

SITE founder Rita Katz told The Post that her company covertly obtained an early copy of a bin Laden video message in early September, then shared the video with senior administration officials on Sept. 7 on the condition that it not be distributed or made public before its official release. Soon afterward, the video was downloaded by dozens of computers registered to government agencies. Within hours, SITE's copy of the video was leaked to television news networks and broadcast worldwide.

It was not explained how SITE had "obtained an early copy" of an Osama bin Laden video, but it was far from the only time that mysteriously well-connected internet researchers had unexplained exclusive access to Al Qaeda video productions. Researchers and companies who supposedly scooped the intelligence agencies by "discovering" and publishing Al Qaeda messages (sometimes even ahead of Al Qaeda itself) included:

- SITE, or the "Search for International Terrorist Entities," whose [promotional materials](#) touted the company's "one-of-a-kind access" to "messages, videos, and advance warnings of suicide bombings" from "the most hard-to-reach corners of violent online extremist communities," whose clientele included leading media outlets and even government agencies, and whose founder, Rita Katz, was born in Iraq to a wealthy Jewish businessman father who was convicted of spying for Israel in 1969 in a military tribunal and executed in a public hanging (which, [we are told](#), Katz did not think had much bearing on her work) and who, despite not having any intelligence connections herself, found a job allowing her to search for terrorists online shortly after moving to New York in the 1990s;
- "[Laura Mansfield](#)," a pseudonymous South Carolina housewife who—despite being a self-described "mom sitting here in her dining room typing away on my computer"—is fluent in Arabic, who likes to "monitor" *jihadi* message boards and chat rooms, and who—with no special training or connections to the world of terror or espionage—was consistently able to find and publicize Al Qaeda videos before anyone else, including: [a "2007" video of Osama bin Laden](#) that, it was quickly discovered, was [actually a five-year-old video](#) that had already been previously released but reported as "new" by the credulous mainstream press; and multiple releases featuring "Azzam the American," a.k.a. Adam Pearlman, the Jewish Californian whose [grandfather was a board member of the Anti-Defamation League](#) and who, [we are told](#), converted to Islam with a single internet post and was quickly recruited by Al Qaeda to serve as "translator, video producer, and cultural interpreter" for their media committee;

**ADAM GADAHN:** All you who believe, fight the unbelievers who are closest in proximity to you and let them find harshness in you. And know that Allah is with those who fear him.

**SOURCE:** [Al Qaeda: Hoax](#)

- and IntelCenter, a company described as "a private contractor working for intelligence agencies" and headed by Ben Venzke—the former Director of Intelligence Special Projects at iDefense, where he worked alongside people like Jim Melnick, a psychological operations

specialist who served sixteen years in the US Army and the Defense Intelligence Agency—that similarly supplied the US government and media with Al Qaeda videos released by As-Sahab, the terror group's media production arm, and somehow exclusively obtained by this private contractor in Virginia.

The public had good reason to question the reality of these suspiciously timed and mysteriously sourced audio and video recordings.

In 1999, William Arkin wrote a piece for *The Washington Post* called "[When Seeing and Hearing Isn't Believing](#)" in which he reported on the digital morphing technologies that were then being worked on by research teams at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and elsewhere. He reported on one demonstration of this technology—a fake recording of Gen. Carl W. Steiner, former Commander-in-Chief, US Special Operations Command, announcing "Gentlemen! We have called you together to inform you that we are going to overthrow the United States government." The fake audio was so impressive that General Steiner asked for a copy. Another demonstration involved Colin Powell announcing that he was being well treated by his captors.

"Digital morphing — voice, video, and photo — has come of age, available for use in psychological operations. PSYOPS, as the military calls it, seek to exploit human vulnerabilities in enemy governments, militaries and populations to pursue national and battlefield objectives. [. . .] Being able to manufacture convincing audio or video, they say, might be the difference in a successful military operation or coup."

The technology continued to feature in PSYOPS planning as the war of terror dragged on. In 2003, the CIA Iraq Operations Group came up with a "[wacky idea](#)" for discrediting Saddam Hussein in the eyes of his people: to create a video purporting to show the Iraqi dictator having sex with a teenage boy. Amazingly, Stein also confirmed that the CIA *did* make a fake video of Osama bin Laden:

The agency actually did make a video purporting to show Osama bin Laden and his cronies sitting around a campfire swigging bottles of liquor and savoring their conquests with boys, one of the former CIA officers recalled, chuckling at the memory.

But as successful as these information operations and Al Qaeda media releases were in keeping the terror threat in the minds of the public, the neocons directing this war of terror were going to need much more than that to meet their objectives. The war on terror, launched in Afghanistan and waged in Iraq, was never meant to end there.

**BUSH:** The other strain of radicalism in the Middle East is Shi'a extremism, supported and embodied by the regime that sits in Tehran. Iran has long been a source of trouble in the region. It is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

[. . .]

Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. And that is why the United States is rallying friends and allies around the world to isolate the regime, to impose economic sanctions. We will confront this danger, before it is too late.

**SOURCE:** [Remarks at the American Legion National Convention in Reno, Nevada](#)

But getting the public—already weary of the years-long struggle in Afghanistan and increasingly disillusioned with the debacle in Iraq—on board with the invasion of yet another country was going to be difficult unless another spectacular terror event came along to justify opening up yet another front in the war on terror. And, if the terror bogeyman was not willing to provide such a justification, the neocons were once again ready and willing to create it.

**FAIZ SHAKIR:** What you're writing there is that Cheney—there was a meeting in the White House where Cheney presided over looking to cook up the next war, a false war based on false intelligence!

[. . .]

**SEYMOUR HERSH:** There was a dozen ideas proffered about how to trigger a war. The one that interested me the most was why don't we build - we in our shipyard - build four or five boats that look like Iranian PT boats. Put Navy SEALs on them with a lot of arms. And next time one of our boats goes to the Straits of Hormuz, start a shoot-up. Might cost some lives and it was rejected, because you can't have Americans killing Americans. But that that's the level of stuff we were talking about. Provocation.

**SOURCE:** [\*Cheney Plans to Blow Up Americans\*](#)

Seymour Hersh was not the only one warning about the possibility of the Bush White House staging a terror event in the waning days of its administration to trigger a bold new escalation with Iran. Even Zbigniew Brzezinski—whose involvement in Operation Cyclone started the American involvement in Afghanistan that led to the creation of Al Qaeda in the first place—[warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2007](#) that a military provocation or terrorist act whose origin "would be very difficult to trace" could be staged and blamed on Tehran in order to justify US military action on Iran.

**BRZEZINSKI:** A plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran involves Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks followed by accusations of the Iranian responsibility for the failure, then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the United States blamed on Iran, culminating in a "defensive" US military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**SOURCE:** [\*Zbigniew Brzezinski: Transcript of Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee\*](#)

But the neocons—suffering from plummeting approval ratings, mounting domestic difficulties and the ramifications of a global financial crisis—no longer had the political capital to stage terror events and garner public approval for their agenda. By 2008, after seven long years in the grip of the existential threat that they were told was the basis for a generation-defining, civilizational struggle with no end in sight, the American public was getting tired. They didn't want the neocons and their endless war on terror. They were hoping for change.

Luckily for them, that's precisely what the 2008 US presidential election seemed to offer.

The public was ready for change. In fact, the idea of a shift from the bellicose, belligerent, aggressive foreign policy and the war on terror rhetoric of the neocons to the promised hope and change of the Obama administration was so enticing that not only did Obama win the 2008 election,

he also won over the world at large. So excited were people for the prospect of peace that the Nobel Peace Prize committee decided to bestow their 2009 prize on Obama before he had taken a single substantive action in office.

**THORBJORN JAGLUND:** Good morning. Den Norske Nobelkomite har bestemt at Nobels fredspris for 2009 skal tildeles president Barack Obama for hans ekstraordinære innsats for å styrke internasjonalt diplomati og mellomfolkelig samarbeid.

**SOURCE:** [2009 Nobel Peace Prize Announcement](#)

Those not swept up in the hope and change delirium were quick to point out that the committee had made a mistake in handing a peace prize to a president still actively involved in military engagements. What not even his most cynical critics seemed prepared for, however, was the idea that Obama would not only continue the Bush administration's war on terror but that he would greatly expand it. From the two-front war in Afghanistan and Iraq under Bush, Obama would ultimately lead the war of terror into *seven* countries.

One of Obama's first moves in office was to oversee a dramatic escalation in Afghanistan, a "[troop surge](#)" that was meant to resolve the security issues in the country but actually exacerbated them, finally leading to the dramatic downfall of the US-backed regime and the reinstallation of the Taliban in 2021. And, as we shall see, despite promising a swift resolution to the war in Iraq, not only was the handover of authority to the Iraqi government delayed as long as legally possible but the US was ultimately drawn in again as the terror group that they fostered led to a battle against the Islamic State.

But the newly revitalized war on terror—now given new cover by a smiling, peace-prizing-winning, softer-spoken Commander-in-Chief—did not end there.

Obama oversaw the expansion of Bush's drone war into Pakistan:

**ANCHOR:** US President Barack Obama, meanwhile, has admitted for the first time that drones are regularly striking Taliban and Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan's tribal areas.

**SOURCE:** [Obama defends illegal drone attacks](#)

**OBAMA:** I want to make sure that people understand actually drones have *not* caused a huge number of civilian casualties. For the most part, they have been very precise, precision strikes against Al Qaeda and their affiliates.

**SOURCE:** [Your Interview with the President - 2012](#)

He led the "kinetic military action" in Libya against previous war on terror ally Moammar Gaddafi:

**OBAMA:** Good afternoon, everybody. Today I authorized the Armed Forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to protect Libyan civilians. That action has now begun.

**SOURCE:** [President Obama Authorizes Limited Military Action in Libya](#)

He began the decade-long attempt to overthrow previous war on terror ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria:



**OBAMA:** My policy from the beginning has been that President Assad had lost credibility, that he attacked his own people, has killed his own people, unleashed a military against innocent civilians, and that the only way to bring stability and peace to Syria is going to be for Assad to step down and to move forward on a political transition.

**SOURCE:** [\*Obama: Assad Must Step Down for Syrian Peace\*](#)

He waged war in Yemen along with the Saudi government, who had supported and fostered terror groups in the region for years:

**AMY GOODMAN:** Documents obtained by Reuters show the US government is concerned it could be implicated in potential war crimes in Yemen because of its support for a Saudi-led coalition air campaign. The Obama administration has continued to authorize weapons sales to Saudi Arabia despite warnings last year from government lawyers that it might be considered a co-belligerent under international law.

**SOURCE:** [\*U.S.-Backed Saudi Forces Bomb Yemeni Funeral\*](#)

And he extended the "[Authorization for Use of Military Force](#)"—the legislation passed in the wake of 9/11 authorizing the president to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against those nations, organizations or persons he determines "planned, authorized, committed or aided" that attack—to include Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

**JOHN KERRY:** The United States, obviously, has been engaged in helping Somalia fight back against tribal terror and the challenges to the cohesion of the state of Somalia. And the President and his allies have really done an amazing job of fighting back and building a state structure.

**SOURCE:** [\*Secretary Kerry Delivers Remarks With Somali President Mohamud\*](#)

But although these escalations appeared to be a mere continuation of the War on Terror that was sold to the public in the wake of 9/11, they were not. In fact, it quickly became apparent that a remarkable transition had begun to occur. Al Qaeda, the ultimate face of evil and the undisputed enemy in the grand terror war narrative, were now the "good guys"—or at least serviceable allies—in the fight against the next target in the war of terror.

This unbelievable turnaround had in fact begun during the Bush administration, when the neocons had started to set their sites on Iran. Being predominately Shiite, Iran is in fact the enemy of the radical Wahabbis and Salafist Muslims that populate the ranks of Al Qaeda and other Sunni terror groups. In targeting Iran, the US—like the British Empire before them—found it convenient to switch allegiances, arming, funding and promoting the very radicals they had just been at war with in order to defeat their enemy of the moment.

As Seymour Hersh [reported in 2007](#):

In the past few months, as the situation in Iraq has deteriorated, the Bush Administration, in both its public diplomacy and its covert operations, has significantly shifted its Middle East strategy. The "redirection," as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. [. . .] A byproduct of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

As Hersh detailed in his articles on "[The Redirection](#)" and "[Preparing the Battlefield](#)," and as other mainstream sources eventually corroborated, this "shift in Middle East strategy" by the Bush administration included:

- [supporting Fatah al-Islam](#)—a militant Islamic fighting force [led by](#) a "former associate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi" dedicated to "spreading the ideology of Al Qaeda"—in their struggle against Iranian ally (and Israeli enemy) Hezbollah;
- providing covert funds to the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, a strange [cult-of-personality](#) that, as a violent group of radicals that participated in bombings [inside Iran](#) and even aided Mossad in [assassinating Iranian scientists](#), was not merely lauded by the US but [openly promoted at gala events](#) by neocons and their fellow-travellers;
- [secretly backing "opposition groups" in Syria](#), one of Iran's most important regional allies;
- and "[supplying money and weapons](#)" to Jundullah, a group with "[close ties to Al Qaeda](#)" (including reportedly being at one time headed by alleged "9/11 mastermind" Khalid Sheikh Mohammed) that "[conducted raids into Iran from bases in Pakistan](#)" with covert CIA assistance.

That these operations would have started under Bush and the neocons came as little surprise to those who knew anything about the real nature of the so-called war on terror. That they would be continued and even expanded under Obama, the Ambassador of Hope and Change, was more surprising to those who did not yet grasp the true scale and scope of this war.

No, the substance of the Bush redirection did not change under Obama, only the tone and flavour of that policy changed. Obama did not win [multiple](#) advertising [awards](#) for his 2008 Hope and Change election campaign for nothing. As a shrewd salesman of an unpopular agenda, he knew that to get the public on board with such a radical shift in objectives, he was going to need an equally radical event to take place to tie a bow on the Osama bin Laden narrative and redirect the public's attention.

And, on May 2, 2011, that event occurred.

**OBAMA:** Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

**SOURCE:** [Osama bin Laden Dead](#)

Codenamed Operation Neptune Spear, the mission to kill bin Laden involved a daring team of Navy SEALs flying two stealth-modified Black Hawk helicopters from the Jalalabad military base in Afghanistan through Pakistani air space straight to Abbottabad—the affluent military town where the world's most wanted man had evidently been living for years, evading the most comprehensive dragnet in history. Crash landing one of the choppers in the compound courtyard, a massive firefight broke out. The SEALs, clearing weapons stashes and barricades while fending off bin Laden's henchmen, made their way to the third-floor bedroom where the dastardly villain used one of his wives as a human shield. Shooting her in the leg to get her out of the way, the SEALs then

managed to land two shots on their target, one hitting bin Laden in the head and the other in the chest—just as the terror kingpin was reaching for the gun he kept at the ready by his headboard.

Making good their escape, the Navy SEAL heroes blew up their damaged helicopter while a standby chopper that had been prepared for the mission in case of an emergency flew in and whisked the remaining task force members out with bin Laden's body in tow. Returning to Bagram Air Base, bin Laden's body was immediately flown out to the USS *Carl Vinson*, where it was buried at sea in accordance with Islamic tradition.

And just like that, it was done. Public Enemy number one, the face of the war on terror, was dead; slain by the valiant Navy SEALs in a daring operation that was broadcast in real time to the White House Situation Room, where the Commander-in-Chief of the War of Terror, Barack Obama, and his iron-willed cabinet of terror warriors watched with steely determination.

Indeed, this was not the stuff of history books, no dry, dusty tale of some minor police action or military operation. It may not have been the grand showdown in the cave fortress that the public had been prepared for, but—befitting the comic book supervillain of the war on terror narrative—this was the stuff of Hollywood blockbusters.

**DEVGRU OPERATOR:** Geronimo. For God and country. Geronimo.

**SOURCE:** [\*Zero Dark Thirty\* \(2012\)](#)

Yes, this was the stuff of Hollywood blockbusters. But, like a Hollywood blockbuster, the story of the raid was itself fiction. In fact, in the face of mild questioning by the generally deferential press, every single aspect of the confusing and often contradictory story that was told to the public in those euphoric hours after Obama's momentous announcement was proven to be a lie.

There had been [no firefight](#).

Osama was [not armed](#).

He did not use his wife as a [human shield](#).

Burial at sea was not part of Islamic tradition. In fact, it was [directly opposed to that tradition](#).

Even the [famous picture from the Situation Room](#) was a lie; there had been [no live video feed](#) of the raid.

But it wasn't just the details of the raid itself that had been a fabrication; the entire story of the decade-long manhunt for Osama, dramatized in Oscar-winning movies like *Zero Dark Thirty* and recounted in countless reports, books and tell-alls, proved to be similarly fraudulent.

In fact, the story began to fall apart from the very moment it was told to the public. But while most of the press remained content to pick at the corners of the story, leaving the substance of the narrative intact, others dug deeper, looking for answers amid the confusing confluence of lies, obfuscations, cover-ups and contradictions that surrounded the raid.

In a [lengthy article](#) for *The London Review of Books* in 2015 that—sourcing to unnamed, retired officials with no direct knowledge of the events recounted—was about as solidly sourced as the official account, Seymour Hersh alleged that, while bin Laden had indeed been killed in Abbottabad, he had in fact been living at the compound as a prisoner of the ISI for years and that every part of the official narrative of the raid—from the story of the "Al Qaeda courier" by which

the CIA allegedly discovered the compound to the phony vaccination drive to collect bin Laden's DNA to the burial at sea—was in fact an element of an elaborate (and seemingly unnecessary) cover story to obscure that fact.

In a [piece for \*The Independent\*](#) the year after the raid, Patrick Cockburn pointed out the inherent contradiction between early reports that the raid had uncovered a "[treasure trove](#)" of intelligence that "portrayed bin Laden as a spider at the centre of a conspiratorial web" and later admissions that he had had almost no contact with the outside world and was increasingly delusional about his organization and its capabilities.

Others simply [pointed out](#) that, given this was at least the [ninth occasion](#) in which journalists, politicians, intelligence officials or others had pronounced Osama bin Laden dead, it was not to be believed without evidence.

But that evidence was not forthcoming. Instead, the government went to extraordinary lengths to cover it up. All the files from the raid—including "copies of the death certificate and autopsy report for bin Laden as well as the results of tests to identify the body"—were [deleted from the Pentagon's computers](#) and transferred to the CIA, where they could be more carefully guarded from Freedom of Information Act requests.

Pictures and video of the raid, including pictures of Osama bin Laden's dead body that—the [public were told](#)—may be released, were instead [sealed away forever](#).

At the time, all that was released were a few short videos of a man purported to be Osama bin Laden that—it was claimed—had been taken from the compound (although it was never explained why bin Laden would have poorly shot video of his back to the camera, watching himself on TV) and some salacious details about the records allegedly seized from the compound's computers—like the devout Muslim *jihadi*'s [predilection for porn](#)—that seemed reminiscent of the CIA's previous "wacky ideas" for faking videos about Hussein and bin Laden.

But CIA director Leon Panetta *did* [leak classified details](#) of the raid at a 2011 award ceremony attended by Mark Boal, the screenwriter who would go on to write and produce *Zero Dark Thirty*, the Hollywood dramatization of the manhunt for Osama that portrayed the official version of the raid on the silver screen and even falsely implied that the CIA's illegal torture program had been essential in helping to track down the terror kingpin.

The full truth of what happened in Abbottabad, now obscured by lies, misinformation, selective "leaks," self-serving tell-alls and still-classified data will likely never see the light of day. But to the directors of the War of Terror, that is beside the point. Osama bin Laden had served his purpose as the villain in the terror war story. And, having served that purpose, he was being written out of the script.

In the end, that was all Osama bin Laden had ever been: a character in the terror war drama. One so good that, if he didn't exist, they would have had to invent him.

**RATHER:** Well, it's pretty obvious the judgment is coalescing around the president that it was Osama bin Laden.

**MILT BEARDEN:** I know we live in a country where we're often told that the first thing that comes to your mind, put it down. Put the little mark in there.

I feel slightly uncomfortable because I spent so many years wondering how the myth of Osama bin Laden got started. We have the Osama bin Laden who was the great war hero in Afghanistan. We have Osama bin Laden who was trained by CIA, funded and supported by CIA during three years of war.

I was there at the same time bin Laden was there. He was *not* the great warrior that went in and fought the Soviet Union to a standstill. The CIA had nothing to do with him.

I think that that mythological Osama bin Laden—never mind that he's an absolutely evil man—but the mythological Osama bin Laden causes me trouble, and I think maybe there is another answer out there. I'm not certain that I know what it is.

[. . .]

**RATHER:** There's no question in my mind that you're skeptical that Osama bin Laden, aided and abetted or at least protected with the Taliban, should be the principal target of some large military operation. If I'm wrong, tell me now.

**BEARDEN:** No, no, no. You're not wrong, Dan. [What] I'm saying is—let me step back one step on this and say Osama bin Laden is an evil man and he's a component of the terrorism that we're dealing with across the board. All I'm saying is that I think Osama bin Laden has become the metaphor for the entire problem of terrorism involving Muslims with perceived grievances against the United States and I think it would be wrong to say this is a one-size-fits-all operation and to go after bin Laden because an operation as sophisticated as carried out yesterday was an operation that was concealed from us for months, probably, before it took place. It happened without, essentially, a hitch, except for one aircraft. And there is no reason to believe that these same people weren't capable of covering their tracks somehow on the way out.

Now, I would go so far as to say that this group who was responsible for that, if they didn't have an Osama bin Laden out there they'd invent one because he's a terrific diversion for the rest of the world.

**SOURCE:** [CBS Sept. 13, 2001 0:14 am - 0:56 am](#)

The death of Osama bin Laden may have ended one chapter in the War on Terror, but it was not the end of the story. In a key sense, that story would simply repeat, with the rise of Al Qaeda serving as a template that the terror war planners could draw upon as needed in their efforts to prolong their never-ending conflict indefinitely.

The alignment with radical Islamists to achieve short-term geostrategic goals—a strategy refined by the British Empire over centuries of practice in the "Great Game" of global geopolitics and reaching its apotheosis with the US operation to arm the Afghan Mujahideen in the 1980s—was simply employed once again as the US led its NATO allies in a "[humanitarian war](#)" against Moammar Gaddafi in Libya. Former enemies in the war on terror, including veterans of the Iraq insurgency who had been killing American troops in Iraq, and even designated terrorists who had been rendered and tortured by the CIA, were [now the good guys](#), helping to overthrow Gaddafi's government in Tripoli.

That same story played out yet again in Syria, where the US and its regional allies once again made a deal with the devil, this time in the name of toppling the government of Bashar al-Assad. [Arming](#)

the most radical elements of these terror groups with US-procured weapons and [training](#) them at a US joint operation base in Jordan, it was not long before the Bush-era "redirection" of the terror war was complete and Al Qaeda was now widely recognized as a convenient ally of the US in Syria.

In 2012, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Senior Fellow Ed Husain wrote of "[Al-Qaeda's Specter in Syria](#)," noting that "The Syrian rebels would be immeasurably weaker today without Al Qaeda in their ranks."

In 2014, a trio of foreign policy "experts" published a piece for the CFR on "[The Good and Bad of Ahrar al-Sham: An Al Qaeda-Linked Group Worth Befriending](#)."

And in 2015, Barak Mendelsohn—writing in the pages of the same *Foreign Affairs* magazine in which Philip Zelickow and his co-authors had "predicted" the terror war—penned "[Accepting Al Qaeda: The Enemy of the United States' Enemy](#)," in which he argued:

Since 9/11, Washington has considered Al Qaeda the greatest threat to the United States, one that must be eliminated regardless of cost or time. After Washington killed Osama bin Laden in 2011, it made Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's new leader, its next number one target. But the instability in the Middle East following the Arab revolutions and the meteoric rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) require that Washington rethink its policy toward Al Qaeda, particularly its targeting of Zawahiri. Destabilizing Al Qaeda at this time may in fact work against U.S. efforts to defeat ISIS.

In conclusion, Mendelson writes flatly: "It is certainly ironic that at this point, when the United States is the closest it has ever been to destroying Al Qaeda, its interests would be better served by keeping the terrorist organization afloat and Zawahiri alive."

Such arguments, unthinkable during the bin Laden years, were suddenly not only thinkable but were being openly promoted in Beltway foreign policy think tank circles. That such a dramatic turnaround could even be considered, let alone advocated, so soon after the years-long propaganda campaign portraying Al Qaeda as an existential threat to the West is only surprising to those who were ignorant of the real history of Al Qaeda and the real origins of the terror war.

To those who *did* know this history, the fact that those in the State Department's orbit were now openly calling for accommodation of and even alliance with Al Qaeda came as no surprise. And it similarly came as no surprise that this alliance led—exactly as it had in Afghanistan in the 1980s—to the rise of a new terror group: the Islamic State.

Rising from the ashes of the same Al Qaeda in Iraq that had been led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—the US military's self-proclaimed "most successful information campaign to date"—the Islamic State rose to international prominence in 2014 when it captured Raqqa in Syria and began a campaign that saw it take over Mosul and Tikrit in northern Iraq before announcing the establishment of a caliphate.

As a convenient justification for reengaging the American military in Iraq and as another excuse for military intervention in Syria, it was only later that the truth began to emerge: not only had the US [armed](#) and [trained](#) these very ISIS fighters that they were now engaged in mortal struggle with and not only had the US' own Defense Intelligence Agency [precisely predicted](#) the rise of an Islamic State in this area of Syria and Iraq two years before it happened, but US-led forces repeatedly stood down as ISIS convoys moved unimpeded, [allowing them to take Ramadi](#) in 2015 and [allowing a convoy of stranded ISIS fighters to return home](#) in 2017.



The career of the group's new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, followed the now-familiar terror bogeyman pattern. Like his predecessor Zarqawi, Baghdadi was pronounced dead, alive, arrested, dead and alive again so often that news of his actions quickly descended into farce. [Detained by US forces](#) at Camp Bucca in Iraq in 2004, he was reportedly [arrested again in March 2007](#) and [killed in May of that year](#) before being [arrested yet again in 2009](#) and [killed yet again in 2010](#), at which point even *The Times* was [forced to concede](#), "The arrest or death of Mr. Baghdadi, the insurgent fighter, has been reported so many times that it has become a macabre joke."

But he was not done yet.

He was reported to have [died in an Israeli hospital](#) in April of 2015, then [killed in an airstrike](#) in October 2015 and [killed again by the Russians](#) in June 2017 before the Syrian Observatory For Human Rights released a statement insisting he "[Really Is Dead This Time](#)" in July 2017. Yet still he continued to reappear, [reliably resurrected](#) in the [headlines](#) of the [establishment press](#) to [terrorize the public](#) as needed until the [final report](#) of his death in 2019.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the announcement of this, the final death of this remarkably resilient terror mastermind, carefully staged to bring to mind Obama's dramatic announcement of the death of Osama bin Laden and to rally the country around the flag once again .

..

**DONALD TRUMP:** Last night the United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead.

**SOURCE:** [President Trump Delivers Remarks](#)

... is that few in the public seemed even to notice that it had taken place.

And, in 2022, when Biden took his turn as the conquering hero, announcing the death of Ayman Al-Zawahiri:

**BIDEN:** My fellow Americans, on Saturday, at my direction, the United States successfully concluded an air strike in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed the Emir of Al Qaeda, Ayman Zawahiri.

**SOURCE:** [Biden Announces Death Of Al Qaeda Leader Ayman Al-Zawahri](#)

... again it was greeted by a collective shrug. Few in the public even knew Zawahiri's name, let alone gave him much thought.

For a world that had just lived through two decades of near daily assurances that Al Qaeda was so existential a threat to human civilization that it justified a worldwide, never-ending War on Terror of unlimited scope, this was nothing short of remarkable. The War of Terror, it seemed, might end not with a bang but a whimper.

For the families of Zemari Ahmadi and all the millions whose blood was spilled in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and all the other lands that have been torn apart by the senseless carnage of the past two decades, the growing apathy of the American public to the terror war narrative may come as cold comfort. But to those who have spent decades living under the shadow of the ever-present terror fearmongering, cynically wielded by politicians and governments

to keep their populations cowering under the weight of colour-coded terror threats, the rejection of the terror war narrative is undeniably a turning point.

But, even if the public, having snapped out of the Al Qaeda delusion, is content to move on with their lives and to prepare to live in a post-terror world, the terror warriors have other plans.

What many in the public have failed to realize is that the War of Terror was never really about Osama bin Laden. It was never really about Al Qaeda. It wasn't about radical Muslims. At base, it wasn't even about geopolitical goals or reshaping the map of the Middle East.

It was about us.

**NERMEEN SHAIKH:** The Obama Administration's internal legal justification for assassinating US citizens without charge has been revealed for the first time.

**SOURCE:** [\*Kill List Exposed: Leaked Obama Memo Shows Assassination of U.S. Citizens "Has No Geographic Limit"\*](#)

**RAND PAUL:** I don't know. If the president's going to kill these people, he needs to let them know. Some of the people [who] might be terrorists are people who are missing fingers. Some people have stains on their clothing. Some people have changed the color of their hair.

**SOURCE:** [\*Senator Rand Paul exposes scary definition of 'possible terrorist'\*](#)

**CHRIS CUOMO:** This was no mere protest gone awry. It was what they used to care about on the right, the worst kind of planned violence: terrorism.

**SOURCE:** [\*CNN March 2, 2021 6:00pm-7:00pm PST\*](#)

**DONALD TRUMP:** These are not acts of peaceful protest, but really domestic terror.

**SOURCE:** [\*BBC News | September 2, 2020 3:00am-3:31am BST\*](#)

**ELAINE QIUJANO:** The Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division told Congress that the Bureau currently has 850 open domestic terror cases. Half of those are anti-government or anti-authority extremists.

**SOURCE:** [\*FBI investigating 850 domestic terror cases\*](#)

**REP. BOEBERT:** And this was what DHS decided to put out in a bulletin that now, if you have COVID misinformation that they classify misinformation, you are a domestic terrorist.

**SOURCE:** [\*'Covid Misinformation Is Now Domestic Terrorism': Says Congresswoman Boebert Citing A DHS Bulletin\*](#)

**CHRYSTIA FREELAND:** First, we are broadening the scope of Canada's anti-money laundering and terrorist financing rules so that they cover crowdfunding platforms and the payment service providers they use.

**SOURCE:** [\*Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act for first time ever in response to protests\*](#)

**BUSH:** There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are children of the same foul spirit, and it is our continuing duty to confront them.

**SOURCE:** [\*Bush calls out domestic terror threat at 9/11 ceremony\*](#)

There, just below the surface of the War on Terror story that was sold to the public—the story of radical, freedom-hating Muslims and cowardly terror attacks and crusading Presidents flanked by their valiant Navy SEALs—is another story. As if written in invisible ink between the lines of the history of Al Qaeda is the story of the PATRIOT Act and the Department of Homeland Security, of the TSA and biometric screening and domestic terror watch lists. It is the story of the creation of an entire infrastructure of legal measures and emergency powers that have quietly transformed the face of the so-called free world.

The terror myth has always served primarily as a tool of domestic control. It is a blank check for every government to enact whatever controls it desires over its population in the name of "security." And the public, convinced of the need for that security by the terror war myth itself, clamours for more government controls. The problem feeds upon itself.

There is only one way to break out of such a vicious circle. The underlying premise of the entire terror war has to be called out for what it is: a lie.

In the end, perhaps this is how the War of Terror *really* ends. Not with the toppling of the Taliban or a "Mission Accomplished" photo op on the deck of an aircraft carrier or the announcement of the death of the arch terror mastermind or even by presidential declaration. Not by these or any of the other illusory endpoints that the terror warriors dangle in front of the public from time to time only to snatch away when grasped at.

No. The War of Terror ends when the public, having learnt the secret history of Al Qaeda, decide to consign the *real* terror threat, the *myth* of Al Qaeda, to the dustbin of history.

## ***FALSE FLAGS: THE SECRET HISTORY OF AL QAEDA***

written, directed and narrated by JAMES CORBETT

video editing and graphic design by BROCC WEST

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***Dedicated to all those who lost their lives in the war of terror and all those who have sought to expose the truth about that war***